

Post –Event Summary Report

Name of the Event: “Workplace Issues for Older Kansans”

Date of Event: May 10, 11, 20, 24, 2005

Locations of Events:

Junction City, Kansas	May 10, 2005
Salina, Kansas	May 11, 2005
Manhattan, Kansas	May 20, 2005
Emporia, Kansas	May 24, 2005

Number of Person attending: 125

Sponsoring Organizations: North Central-Flint Hills Area Agency on Aging, Inc.
(NC-FHAAA)
Older Kansans Employment Program (OKEP)

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Priority Issue #1: The needs of the older job seekers and older workers are not being represented on local and state Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Boards. The focus of the state and local WIA Boards in Kansas is youth programs. The older job seeker should be designated as a special group under the federal Workforce Investment Act.

Barriers: (1) The main barrier is the attitude that the local and state WIA board members in Kansas have toward older job seekers. (2) Lack of understanding among state and local policy makers that older job seekers have special needs.

Proposed Solution: (1) Fair representation on the local and state WIA boards for the older job seekers. (2) Urge the Governor and policy makers to change the state Workforce Investment Act plan to designate Kansans over 55 as a special population group. (3) Include representation from Area Agencies on Aging and state units on aging on WIA boards.

Priority Issue #2: When a SER/SCSEP training participant completes the training period and is receiving unsubsidized employment income the participant’s lose significant public assistance such as food stamps, Medicaid, and subsidized housing. The loss of assistance is due to the fact that once a participant is gainfully employed the income earned makes them ineligible for program benefits.

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Barriers: (1) The SER/SECEP training dollars are from Title V which does not count against public assistance income eligibility requirements. (2) Participants chose not to work in unsubsidized employment because of their need to keep essential benefits.

Proposed Solution: Make changes in current benefit guidelines that allow for a transition period of at least 90 days instead of being cut off so abruptly. This would provide SER/SCSEP participants time to make the financial adjustments that result from loss of their public assistance.

Priority Issue #3: Funding from both state and federal levels to support the local employment and training programs for older job seekers. The local older worker programs offer the wrap around services needed to support the older job seeker. These programs also provide the type of skills needed to assist them in finding a job including skill assessment, resume and interview assistance, completing applications and job counseling. National policy should recognize the existence of successful older worker programs funded by state monies and ensure that these programs are included when policies are made at a national, state and local level

Barriers: (1) Lack of state and federal funding. (2) Lack of grant opportunities available to support the local programs for older workers and job seekers. Most of the grant opportunities are for youth programs. Today more than 50% of the Kansas budget is going to K-12 education, and the courts have ordered legislators to increase the education budget by an additional \$143 million. With this amount of money going to K-12 education we are concerned that senior programs will be cut again which makes their employment even more critical.

Proposed solution: (1) Designate a percentage of WIA funds to support local older job seeker programs. Not only can local programs provide assistance needed for the older job seeker, they also provide information on other programs and services available. Some mature adults are in need of other services such as energy assistance, help with prescription drugs and medication management. Local older worker programs are designed to specifically meet all the needs of older job seekers and older workers. (2) Designate the older job seeker as a special population group.

Priority Issues # 4: Educate and provide outreach to employers about the older job seeker and ways to retrain and retain the older worker.

Barrier: Lack of funding for advertising, job development and employer support.

Solution: Change employer's perception of older workers on the local, state and federal levels by providing useful and practical information and assistance about older workers and older job seekers.

Priority Issue #5: WIA One-Stops in Kansas do not offer the services needed to assist older job seekers but claim to serve everyone. According to the Federal WIA Protocol for Serving Older Workers, dated 11-03-04: "Although the One-Stop system serves a significant number of older workers (5.6 percent of those served in Program Year 2002 age 55 and over), it has historically directed mature workers to the Senior Community Service Program (SCSEP). While the SCSEP is a valuable asset for serving older workers, it should not be the only option available to them. SCSEP in fact, serves only low-income individuals aged 55 and older and has the capacity to serve approximately one percent of the eligible population. This approach has limited business and industries' access to older workers and mature workers' choice with regards to the myriad of workforce investment services available for them through the One-Stop Centers. Mature workers provide One-Stop Career Centers with an invaluable asset for meeting the needs of their business customers. It is important for the workforce investment system to capitalize on the talented pool of workers by ensuring that the full arrays of One-Stop Center services are made available to them." The One Stops do not recognize the needs of the older job seeker.

Barrier: (1) The attitude and perception of decision makers on state and local WIA Boards about the needs of older job seekers and misunderstanding about services available to them. (2) Lack of inclusion of successful state funded initiatives that have proven to meet the needs of older job seekers.

Solution: (1) Allow a percentage of the WIA funds designated to local programs that support older job seekers and provide them the specialized help needed, such as assistance completing an on-line application, building a resume, learning interviewing skills and job coaching. (2) Fair representation on the state and local WIA boards for the older job seeker. (3) Use existing successful model programs such as the Older Kansans Employment Program.

Priority Issue# 6: Lack of training opportunities for low to middle income older job seekers. The training opportunities that are available are not affordable and do not accommodate the different learning styles of older job seekers.

Barriers: Job seekers in need of job training are low to middle income and often cannot afford the cost of training.

Solution: (1) Support initiatives for local job training workshops that meet the needs of low to middle income job seekers. (2) Have the training presented by someone who understands the learning styles of older adults.

Priority Issue #7: Most seniors want part time employment. These jobs typically do not receive any type of benefits. Allow the employer to pay the Medicare premium.

Barrier: The paperwork and system changes required on the Federal level and from the employer.

Solutions: Allow the employer maximum flexibility to provide desired benefits.

Priority Issue #8: Different income requirements for different benefit programs. There are too many program eligible people being lost between the cracks.

Barrier: Each program has specific income eligibility requirements.

Solutions: (1) Have decision-makers at federal and state levels make rules where all benefit programs have same income eligibility requirements.